

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
KHMER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT I**

**INFORMANT: ARN CHORN POND [CAMBODIA]
INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI
DATE: MAY 23, 2003**

**A = ALI
P = POND**

**Tape 03.14
Side A**

A: And today is May 23, 2003, and we're here at Bun Rith's house, at 5 Warwick Street in the Highlands. And we're interviewing Arn Chorn Pond. So Arn, we'll ask you a little bit of background information, but mainly we're going to focus on your experiences around New Hampshire and Lowell, not so much Cambodia, because you've talked about that many times.

P: Umhm.

A: So we'll do some more positive things. So first a little bit of background, where and when were you born?

P: I was born in Battambang Province. It's a Province close to Thailand. (A: Umhm) And I don't know my real date of birth, (A: Okay) because it's all burned away.

A: Yah. Now how about your parents? What were your parents' names?

P: My parents' name, it's almost forgot my parents' name, my real parents' name. Chit Chorn, that's my father, and my mom [unclear].

A: Okay. And how about your grandparents? Did you know their names?

P: I only know his first name, Chit. Oh no, Lung, Lung. Okay, my grand, my grandparents name, my grandfather name Lung, and my great, great, my great grandfather named Chit. So Chit, Lung.

A: Okay, this is all your, this is all your, your father's side.

P: Yah.

A: So your father's father is named Lung. And his father (P: Is named Chit) is named Chit. Okay.

P: My mom's side, I don't know.

A: Okay, and how about your grandmother on your father's side? Do you know the name?

P: On my father's side?

A: Yah. So your father's mother's name.

P: Her name her, that's all I know, her. She's not Cambodian. She's not fully Cambodian. She's probably half [Malin], Jewish, or something.

A: Oh really?

P: Yah, very rare. Very rare. All I know what that she have different religion and she, she has, she eat only oil. Not, not, no, no, like olive oils and other things, not like, not pig.

A: Oh, not pig. So she's like [Cham].

P: No, no, [Cham] I know, but [Cham] I know. Her race didn't call [Bolognese] either. I'm not sure, see. There's some Jewish settle in Cambodia long time ago, long time ago.

A: Jewish.

P: Jewish. (A: Wow) And if she's a Muslim, or she's a [Cham], I would know. They would call her [Cham], but not. (A: Okay) So, but I wonder if she's also a far away Jewish come to Cambodia, (A: Wow) and I already know that it was the case.

A: What did they call those people that descended from that immigrant to Cambodia?

P: Oh they called, the [Cham], they called them [Cham]. (A: Right) And they called them, the other race like Malin, Malin like from Bali, or, but I don't know what they call her. She's a very unique one. That's what I was thinking of, you know. There were some Jewish refugees settled there long time ago. You know there's no Armenian there. There's no, you know, so I think she probably one of the Khmer Jewish and other thing. I don't know. (A: Wow) Yah, very rare. Very rare.

A: What, what else do you know about your grandparents?

P: That's all I know.

A: That's it, okay. And were they from Battambang always?

P: Yes. They're living in the 40s when the Japanese, my grandmother and my grandfather.

A: Okay. [Phone rings]

P: Yup.

A: Okay. All right, now what year did you come over to the states?

P: 1980. (A: Okay) The Fall of 1980.

A: All right, and you were sponsored by a man from New Hampshire.

P: Yah, my adopted father, Peter Pond, and my adopted mom, Shirley Pond.

A: Okay. And did they go to Thailand to pick you up?

P: My dad has a lot of history about Thailand, because my mom was still here in New Hampshire. And my dad was kind of sort of a international guy, you know, he started a, sort of Peace Corps in, in not Costa, (A: Ivory Coast) Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico. (A: Oh Puerto Rico?) He spoke, he spoke, he spoke Spanish. And how he connected to Thailand was his grandma. No, his mother, which is my grandma now, his mother was a resident of Thailand. Sort of like, she took resident there for a long time ago in Bangkok, because her, her new husband, which is not Peter's dad, they divorced. (A: Okay) So her husband, which is Peter's step dad, was the, was the American Ambassador for Thailand. (A: Really) Yah, after World War II. And he died there. And he was so incredible, incredibly smart and you know, was helpful to Thailand and plus became very close to Thai [unclear] Queen. So she settled there, and Peter visited her in 1980, 1979, with a son, thirteen-year-old Peter, Jr.

A: Okay.

P: He looks a little bit like you.

A: All right.

P: You remind me of him. Peter, Jr. was thirteen. And then probably Peter was, didn't know what happened. He just, he was curious. He never heard of refugees before, like camp. So Peter took Peter, Jr. to visit, to visit the camp where I just arrived, called Sakaeo Camp. (A: Okay) When he got there, like I don't know, this is he told me later

on about why he keep returning to the camp. He was shocked by what's going on there. In like one square mile called Sakaeo Camp, one square mile there's thousand, thousands of people packed up into that camp. And like so many people died everyday there. I remember it too, when I was there, almost close to death. You know they, we couldn't eat any food. They give us, they only give us a [klikos] to drink, because our stomach couldn't, couldn't eat anything. And I remember they build, so many people died, they build a small refrigerator like a home, a refrigerator house to put the dead people in there. And I walked cross by there every day, every other day you know, close by. If I fall I would have been dead and put in that house. Then Peter, Peter was really like shocked for him in his life. He's never seen anything like that before. So he kept on going back. He told his mom that there's something for him to do there. So that how he met me.

A: Do you remember meeting him?

P: I don't, it's very how do they say it, dramatic. I, yes. He came. It was raining at night. Usually it was monsoon, right, and the kids were like sleeping. There were no camp, there was just tent, tent. They put a tent on, and the tent roof, and then when it's flood, you know the rain comes like three or four hours at a time, and it flood. And I couldn't move. I mean even though I was probably twelve years old, I probably was weighed 40 pounds. I couldn't move. And the kids were, few kids were flooded to death there. They couldn't rescue them because it's late at night, and it was dark. And Peter is one of the rescuers. Again it was probably two or three hundred kids, children there. A little boy, babies too. But they found out in the morning how many kids dead, drowned to death. And Peter was practically stepped on me, like he's like two hundred pounds, two hundred a fifty pounds. He stepped on me, I sort of clung to him, and I just probably cry and scream or something. He said he saw my teeth. I had really white teeth. And he just, I never let him go. I just clung on him until he, he put me in a safe place. And in the morning he found out how many kids died. But then in the morning he keep coming back and tried to find me among the kids, and he keep bringing me food and I share with other kids. (A: Yah) And that's how I know, I knew for the first time he likes me, sort of, you know. So that's how he met me.

A: Yah. Now how much longer was it before you got (--)

P: A year I think. A year.

A: Oh a year?

P: A year later.

A: You stayed in the camp another year.

P: Yah, because you know what? Because he try and he ask his mom to help, but there were no, there were no, this is, I didn't know anything about this until recently. You know that there was no international law, or American law to have a Cambodian refugee to go and to resettle anywhere. (A: Oh) Because in spite of what, in spite of the many

testimonies that people give to the international community about how the Khmer Rouge kill people, and we were killing, we were killed by the Khmer Rouge, and nobody knows. They didn't believe the refugees. They said that refugees were, the refugees were economic refugees, not political. You see. So that's why they make the law. And then there were no settlement. They shouldn't be in that camp, and go return to Cambodia. Yah, it was that. And I think Peter was so, was so, he use, was so, I mean was so excited. Oh no, not excited, he was so upset about it that he use his own life to sort of like try to rescue me out. He, he make his life as a case, you know, to do some, a lot of stuff that the Khmer Rouge didn't want him to do, the Thai wouldn't, the Thai soldier wouldn't want him to do, he does it. And then the Thai put him in jail one day. They couldn't take it, the Khmer Rouge, they almost killed him. They arrested him, they put him in jail and they beat him up. And then some of them say, "Here, you want to help Cambodians? Now help them." Because in the jail there were Cambodians prisoners there, and they beat up them, they beat them up badly and they asked Peter to help them if you want to help Cambodians. They don't like Cambodian refugee, those, those [unclear] of Thai. Really I don't want to promote any war, or anything, but they treat the Cambodian there so bad. (A: Yah) And then in the camp practically, I want to tell you this, in the camp from eight o'clock in the morning to five o'clock, the UN peace keeping, the UN Officials control the camp. It doesn't matter whether it's a camp, it's a Pol Pot Camp, Khmer Rouge Camp, or Sok San's Camp, or [Sianuks] Camp, or anybody camp, you know, political camp, it's all political. And after eight o'clock until morning, the Khmer Rouge and the Thai take control. (A: Really) And the Khmer Rouge a lot of time they give money to the Thai to kidnap people to go back to Cambodia to fight against the Vietnamese. You see. Not their interest to have the Cambodian refugees in the refugee camp, (A: Yah) the Khmer Rouge. So the Thai also get their, you know, get their, get their you know, get their benefit from every corner, every corner. That's sad. I think Peter, Peter came back and lobbied here. I mean the Thai, the Thai Queen got very embarrassed about Peter was beat up, beaten up. He does that intentionally. Peter was beat up almost to kill, because he works also with a Monk, a famous Monk, Cambodian famous Monk in the camp [unclear], and now he's known as the Cambodian Handy.

A: Really?

P: Yah, [unclear].

A: Oh he came.

P: Yah, [unclear].

A: Did you know him in the camp?

P: Yah, sure.

A: Really?

P: Sure. I know him. He knows me a long time since my dad met me, my dad met him, and they all both worked together, the Reverend and the Monk (A: Really) worked together. And he knew, he knew that tens of thousands of Cambodian refugees would be returned to Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge lobby it for the Thai. They had a secret plan. And then because, there were because no international community saying that the Cambodian, Cambodian refugee will settle anywhere unless American opened up there doors, and Peter knew that. That America had to open their doors, they need witness to say that, "Yes, there were killing fields happened," not until then. So Peter, Peter, the Queen, the Queen was so embarrassed. The Queen say, you know, "You want us to kill the soldier, kill the soldier who arrested you?" Peter say, "No, I'm not interested in killing anybody, but I'm interested in you really giving me the two boys, the three boys out of the camp. I want to take them to America." Peter brought us here (A: So who?) because of the Queen. The Queen giving, she let us out.

A: Really?

P: Yah, from the camp. (A: Really) In 1980 we were the first orphans, Cambodian orphans allowed to go anywhere, you know. And Peter was smart. He knows. When I came here, if he, he has a plan. He didn't tell me, us about that. When we got here we put, the next day he put us in, the next week he took us shopping in New Hampshire. The next following day he took us to high school. He's crazy. We never had school before. You see, and he knew that out of three kids probably one will continue to do what he's doing. I sort of didn't know about this, but I chose to. The other two dropped out, which is fine. You know, other two are doing well in their lives. And I, I did all the lobbying with him. In Washington we got, we got, while I was in high school also we went to Washington, and also we got these people involved. Like we began to know Jim Mitchel, the Congressman then. (A: Okay) The Democrat, Jim Mitchel. Mrs. Dukakis. (A: Really) And Paul Tsongas, (A: Really) him and his wife very helpful in the beginning (A: Really) when my dad was here. Yah. We lobbied, I spoke in the Congress hearing about, and I testified so many times in Washington about my life, about Cambodia. I like to think that I was a refugee [unclear], and outspoken. I'd like to think that, we did, we changed the course of American policy. We got enough support, and then we got (--) During the time they were so moved by my speaking, Mrs. Dukakis, Jim Mitchel went to Cambodia to visit refugees.

A: Really.

P: Yes. And then they came back and they were outspoken in, to lobby in Washington. And then they changed the whole thing.

A: Where was Jim Mitchel from?

P: I don't know. I think he's (--)

A: It's not, you're not talking about George Mitchel from, from Maine.

P: Oh maybe George Mitchel.

A: He was a Senator.

P: Yah, George Mitchel.

A: George Mitchel, okay.

P: And Mrs. Dukakis, she went with my dad to Cambodia, and came back and testified in Washington, and saying that refugees, it's unbelievable. They are political refugees. What do you think they are? And we need to, we need to see through [the by-laws] of political, you know, political, political you know, policy. We drop bomb there in Cambodia. You know, we have responsibility in helping the refugees. That's all changed. And we got the Monk here. That Monk also was working around the clock with me. Peter took me out from high school. I had to finish high school. I had to do what he's doing. I'm in practically for four years. I have to get up at 4:00 every morning to learn, to study, and go out with Peter to Washington every other day. (A: Really) We drive only one day back and forth. (A: Really?) The whole like three or four years. And then, then the [Marcos ?] got, got permission. He started many, many temples around the country, Cambodian Temples. He's a pioneer.

A: In the U. S.?

P: [Marcos ?] He's a pioneer. And then more refugees began to arrive here in Cambodia when America lift their policy, and say they got to clear it. America was a powerhouse. And when, when enough, enough witness and also the Director of Embassy International knows me very well. He asked me to go and you know, speak. And then he include, included all [unclear] in the killing fields. I was one of the youngest, I remember, to try and testify about the Khmer Rouge. And they have all the evidence during the 80s, you know? And then American changed their policy, and they allowed the refugees to come until today.

A: What years did that start taking place?

P: 80, 81, 82, 83, and then 85 and you know, around there. And the people started arriving since you know, 84, 85 they start arriving. We were the first three Cambodian orphans out of the camp.

A: And what were the names of the two other guys?

P: His name [Sonya Hong? and (? Surrey)]. One of them is a doctor now in Providence, (A: Really) and one of them is the computer scientist. He supervises about 1,000 Americans.

A: Wow.

P: So they're doing well. They [unclear]. But Peter was right. Among the three, one of them you know, continue to do speaking.

A: Yah, and carry on that mission to help people, right?

P: In a way, yah. But I respect other people. So I respect [unclear].

A: So tell me about your first plane ride.

P: We had to America?

A: Yah!

P: Oh man, scary man! Scary man. I, you know, they said, just this, they put me in, they put me first in Bangkok. They took me from the camp to Bangkok, and he put in the [Loupaney] Camp. And um (--)

A: Oh there was a camp in Bangkok?

P: There's a camp in Bangkok, resettlement. I was so nervous. They said if you sick and they call your name to go to America and ride airplane, they wouldn't call you. And my Uncle [unclear] visited us in Bangkok, the Monk give us money from Peter. He went and give, because Monk can travel very easily, freely in Thailand, because they respect Monk. They are no restrictions for Monk. So he went to the cab and give me money. He said, "Here's from Peter."

And I was so happy. And they said, "You will go to America and will ride airplane pretty soon." I don't know how soon, but in that camp we were living with the Vietnamese, with the Phillippinos, with the, you know, all different. For the first time I remembered there were ice cream around, ice cream. And I remember before the Pol Pot you know, I used to, I like ice cream a lot. And there's money for the first time in my hand for many years, and I told the other two guys, I said, "Man, I'm going to, this is my favorite, I'm going to, I'm going to eat ice cream man." I eat ice cream all day, like sit and eat. Those guys warned me, they said, "Arn, you know, I don't know." But then I got a fever, and they called me. They called us and they said, "America!" And I remember people say if you sick they won't allow you to go. Oh man, I eat, I eat ice cream like hell. And then that day, and then I got so, I got big fever and I try, I try to you know, like "Have you got fever?" And probably I got malaria too, you know. I you know, like you got this, you can't even walk. You got up and you got so dizzy. And I tried to walk, not to make myself dizzy, because then they're going to know that I am sick. (A: Yah) Oh I tried so hard man. I did that and throw up and all that, but I didn't let them know. Those two guys were so nervous. But then, then I don't know how it turned out that I was on a plane all of a sudden from Bangkok to, to Copenhagen first.

A: Okay.

P: But a flip flop, a short sleeve and a short pants. Because I give, I give my clothes to all the kids.

A: Oh really!

P: Because they said, “Arn, Arn.” To all my friends in the camp. They said, “Arn, don’t take anything, because you know in America you, you, oh you know, food, you will have food. You will have money. You will have everything you want.” I said, “Okay!” So I give all the clothes and everything. We only have flip flop and short pants, short sleeve. And then when I got on the plane, you know, and the plane, I was sitting, I was assigned to sit near the window. That was bad. And I couldn’t eat any food they offered us in the plane, you know, dark, dark bread. I eat and I throw up right away. They didn’t know what happened with us, you know. The two were sort of okay those two guys. Just [unclear] like me, and I was sicker than any of the two. And I was less smart than other two. Those guys speak some English, you know, they’re smart. [names unclear], you can tell now. They’re doctor, they are you know. I was less smart in term of, compared to those two. And I was sitting in the window and I looked like, one time I looked, I said, “Are we at night here?” We spoke Khmer, the three of us, and the rest like Vietnamese. Again there were no Khmer refugee. There were no Cambodian refugees. All Vietnamese and other refugees. Khmer only us. (A: Wow) And then the, those two tried to explain to me, they said, you know, “We are high man, we are really high now. I mean I think the ocean is down there.” And you know if he falls, oh man, we’re all going to die. But then I looked at the window and I saw the wing shake, the, the (--).

A: The wing?

P: The wing shakes. Shit man, I was scared. I cry loud man. I cry loud, I’d run around. I’d run around and they couldn’t put me on. (A: On the seatbelt?) I said, “No, no, no, get me out of here. Get me out. Get me out.” They said, “Out where?” Those two guys said, “He’s crazy.” Too much sugar still in my body. I was hilarious! And the nurse, oh man! I was scared.

?: So they had to put you to sleep on the plane?

P: No, they didn’t put me to sleep. I don’t know. The nurse tried to explain to me and the two tried to, maybe the two was nervous also and they’re trying to soothe me in Khmer, you know, in Cambodian. Those two didn’t speak like English so well either, but they know something. I don’t know how I was calmed down. I calmed down and then they opened the door like many, many hours later. Oh my God! I never felt the cold in my life. It was Copenhagen, snow. I go out, everybody else like they already have the Vietnamese people that [we carry the bag]. They’re called IOM. My bag. ICM. I carried all. I said, “Where we going man?” I said, “America.” They said, “No, yet,” and all of that. And the nurse really, the nurse see us and she goes like this. Right away they found, they found, they found a jacket for us and a short, long sleeve, and they took the flip flop away and they give us some stuff, you know. I feel good now, people give us clothes for free and stuff like that. I liked it. And

then we go, and then we come back into the plane again. And then at night about 7:00 we got into New York, and I got out and I was scared again, because as soon as I got out of the plane I saw a lot of lights. I was warned in the camp that there were a lot of lights in America. Like, it's like (--) So I thought, I thought it was people fighting, shooting like, you know, like um, silent, silent guns, you know?

A: Yah, yah. But like the blast of a gun.

P: Yah, but it's a lot of light still. Still light, but I just so hilarious. I became so you know, traumatized. I got out and I thought, shit man! I don't know where I was and it's 7:00 and it was New York. And then I was waiting for Peter to come. And then Peter came to pick us up, and then he drive for like (--) First I said, "Rice please. Rice, rice." That's all the word I know, rice. Then Peter knows that I want rice. And then they said, "No rice." I said, "shit." It's just no rice. When he say, "No rice," I got so pissed. I don't know why I got so angry. I mean right now I'm a peacemaker man, completely 110% peacemaker. Man before it's like, I want to ask for rice, and there's no rice, I almost killed Peter, man. I almost like, if I could flip the car, I'd flip the car, man. And I cried hard, because I know, "Why? Why no rice?" He said, "No rice in America." And I almost killed Peter. Those two guys said, "Chill a hole, man." You know. I said, "No, shit." I swear in Khmer. I got so angry. Then he took me to, he took us to McDonald. That's how it was the first time I was exposed to ketchup. (A: Yah) And I love ketchup until now. But I didn't like, I didn't like, I didn't like hamburgers. (A: No) I eat a little bit and I threw up right away again, and I screamed. I asked Peter, I screamed, I screamed in McDonald like people were scared. I screamed, "Rice!" You know, rice, like hard. I screamed, "Rice, rice, rice!" And people looked at us. And I was really damned for rice. You know I couldn't, we didn't eat anything for three days or so.

A: You didn't eat on the airplane huh?

P: I couldn't. I ate, we throw up. We all throw up, not only me. The two, too, couldn't eat, you know, threw up. So I was like, "Rice, man." There was no rice. People looked at us in the McDonald when I screamed so hard. It was like a little kid. I was screaming, really I was vicious. (A: Yah) And Peter said, "No." Then I said, "I'm not going in the car." Oh Peter was pissed too, I can tell. But again, he put us in the car, drive like three more hours to Connecticut, to my, my grandmother's home. She was there. (A: Okay) They have a home in Connecticut. (A: Yah) That's another story itself man. I terrorized the home there.

A: You weren't used to the place?

P: No. I found anything I eat. I'd go explore at night. I didn't sleep at night, you know. I mean those two didn't sleep either, but they're not like me. I start picking up stuff. I go and flush the toilet. I learn. I go around the house. The house was big. (A: Yah) And I go. Anything I could find I eat. Anything that I taste, and I threw (--) I remember all three, I was the only bad boy. But the other two followed me too. And then, when we talk about it those guys like, [unclear]. Those guys probably never talk about it. They

have a wife now. They are doctor. Now they wouldn't talk about it. But I remember it so well. When I opened the refrigerator, and I (--) Those, but I thought I was alone. It was dark. When I opened, like 1:00 in the morning, or 2:00 I opened the refrigerator, "Wow!" I see these two guys. [Laughing] I see the two guys, I said, "Shit man! You are like ghost! What are you doing man?" And then, and then, "Let's see, check it out. Check it out. What we can eat, what we can eat." [Unclear] We keep tasting. We keep tasting. And then we'd pour like (--) We didn't even know, this is how bad it was, we didn't even know to throw, when we eat something to throw anything anywhere. Like we eat, we throw it out a window. We find a window to throw out, and we throw it on the ground. [Laughing]

A: But that's what you did in the camp, right?

P: I didn't know that there were a trash can that you had to throw. Shit, I didn't know. Peter came with bananas, you know, like I just you know, bananas, craving for this kind of bananas here. Like I eat and then, I didn't, I didn't ask them. No, throwing the skin, I was not only one who did that first, but those two guys didn't know either. So we'd throw. Peter come, he said, "Oh shit. What is this kid." And we didn't sleep the whole night. I jump in the bed. The bed is so nice, you know. (A: Yah) I jump, I keep jumping and then they go back out. I keep jumping you know, like you're very nice, and Peter couldn't sleep, you know. Peter said, "Damn, what are you guys doing at night?" And then when Peter tried to come in, we tried to go under covers to try to sleep. I didn't know where we were. (A: Yah) We were very confused and damn. And then a few more hours, New Hampshire. It never ends man.

A: So you didn't sleep, you didn't really sleep that night?

P: The whole like weeks man.

A: Well how long did you stay in Connecticut?

P: One night, over night.

A: Just one night.

P: And then we drive to Providence, ah, to Lowell, ah, to New Hampshire.

A: Yah, where in New Hampshire?

P: It's in the mountain, near Mt. Washington. And man, like you know, people warned us about coming to America. They have like car, they have TV, they have money, whatever you want, you know? It was a really big disappointment, and I also angry again, as soon as we drive, we drive to the [unclear] of the mountain. And Peter said, "That's our house." And it's all jungle again. This is jungle. I say, "Oh shit. What are we doing here, man?"

A: What's the name of the town?

P: It's Jefferson.

A: Jefferson.

P: It's Jefferson, near Mt. Washington and in the jungle. I said, "Oh my God, are we coming to the jungle again?" [Unclear] And he took us to the (--) I had a good time, the next morning he took us to shop, and I see the shopping mall for the first time. I ended up shoplifting too. I didn't know to process. Peter rolled, Peter rolled our cart. He keep putting, he keep putting stuff in there. I said, "Shit man, this guy rich." I talk to my friends, my two boys, my two boys in Khmer. I said, "Oh man, Peter Pond is rich, man. We're lucky we are with him, man, but why he has a house in the jungle, man?" He should be a big house, he had a big house, but you know, he should have it in the city. But then he keep putting clothing in. I said, "Shit, nobody buy anything for us like that, man! Is it for free or something? He didn't pay anything." Peter said, "Huh, huh, huh, you want it? You want it? You want that?" And then he say, he point. I say, "Yah yah, yah yah!" And then I, he went around and I, yah, I keep putting socks in my bag, in my shirt.

A: Stealing them?

P: So we (--) I didn't you know (--) We went out man, we got arrested, alarm. (A: Really?) Yah, we got arrested. We got, we got (--) Peter paid. Then we didn't know that Peter paid, end up paying. And then we got, we got, we got sort of like, they called police and stuff like that. And Peter says, "Okay," you know. And we, "They don't know." And I put it back, and stuff like that. The next day we wear nice clothes for the first time to go to school, the next day to high school. It's called White Mountain, you know, High School.

A: Okay.

P: Yah. Oh went through crazy shit! Oh my God!

A: So the next day huh. And you didn't eat any rice still yet, not Chinese food.

P: No yet, no rice yet. I was still (--) I think Peter know (--) I think a few days Peter sort of know that. I think Peter prepared for that, because he knows. I think we have first fried rice the next three days. After like three day we have to do it ourselves, which is fine. (A: Yah) Yah, we cook. Peter good cook, Peter. Peter, so he cooks, he cooks for us, fried rice. Oh I thank him. Oh, really I was angry and cry, angry and cry. And I eat fried rice. Damn it was like heaven to us. But again, still, like mentally we were like confused.

A: Yah, yah. So you went to school. And how was the first day at school?

P: We were, we were, sure we were confused. We were, we were asked by (--) We were introduced to someone, to everybody, but the whole school system, like we had nothing. We never been in school before. (A: Yah) And we saw white kid [unclear], white children, white kids, man, for the first time in our lives, man. So many of them. There's no black, there's no anybody, white kid, which is fine. We were not intimidated. And people looked at us you know, and they were walking you know, after their class. And I was so scared, because I'm afraid where to go and lose myself. You know, I got lost. Oh man, there was such confusion for us again, but they assigned three men to sort of holding hand. Sort of, not holding hand, but take us. We had to follow the guy everywhere he goes. They were like goalie, goalie you know, like a soccer player. A goalie. A goalie.

A: Oh okay.

P: He's the most popular, they are most popular. You know, I tried to hold his hand. He like slap me. He doesn't want me to hold his hand. (A: Yah) See, or we sit in the classroom. I don't know what the hell they were doing, and I don't know, I just sit there. Sit and then go out. And sit, go out. It take, it took us, it took us seven years in that school. (A: Really) Six years, seven years to finish that school.

A: How old were you when you first started going to school?

P: It's um, (A: Roughly?) roughly fourteen, fifteen. And then I was confused. We had a fight with the kids. The kids, you know, didn't know. I mean they're not suppose to play with our hats. They played with our hats.

A: With your hats?

P: Yah, they go.

A: Yah, they pat you on the head?

P: They pat in the head. In Cambodia, no man. It's, it's our, it's our mothers' there, Buddha is there. Then when we ended up hitting them in the butt, they got so angry and we fight. And then I, I'm one of the troubled one. I'm [unclear] too. I was trouble. I had a fight with my English teacher. I pull, you know, I pull her hair, (A: Really?) spit in her face. (A: Really) I ran away from home. (A: Umm) So I was suicidal. I mean I, I really, I really, I don't know where we are. And the two was like strong, much stronger than I did. And at home and my mom come and scream at us sometime, because again, I pee out of my windows, and I didn't know where to pee. And then I was scared of ghosts, you know. Again, it was a whole confusion.

A: Yah.

P: And I didn't know where my families they were. You know, why I get out of Cambodia to come to this place again? And then we'd eat bananas, and I didn't know

that like you put bananas like this in a bowl for everyone. I always took it to my room, and then I eat. I eat until I, I only eat fruit until the morning. From after you know, coming back from school, and still don't know what I've been doing in school. Coming back, and just wait to come back home and just eat, eat until the morning. Like 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, we didn't sleep. We couldn't sleep, you know? I remember I eat. My other two stay in the, up, up, up second floor. And there was, there was a moonlight. Oh my God, man! I just eat the banana and look at the moon. And then the two were so scared they couldn't sleep. They come down and join me too. And we talk, we talk, we talk. And those two guys were talking about stuff. I just like eat my way. And then in the morning my mom came in, she was screaming. She was screaming you know, she didn't know either. You know, she was scared. Everyone is screaming. Said, "This bowl is for everyone, not for only you three guys." And then the whole banana peel was on the floor, and on my, you know, I didn't know where to put it. I put it under my pillow and stuff like that. (A: Yah) I just don't know what happened. She, I said, (--) And then I asked those two guys, I said, "Why she got so angry?" Those two guys say, "I don't know either man. Maybe you do something wrong." Yah, maybe she start smelling the pees. [All laugh] No pee! I said, "Should we?" I didn't want to go to the, to the, like to the bathroom because you know, when we flush it, (A: It makes noise) noise, you know. And also when I don't want to flush it, it's too difficult, or whatever you know, I just open the door and pee outside through the windows. So I mean those kind of things. When I got, just think about it, got tired, man. Really, got tired out of that experience.

A: So what was the next big change in your life? (P: Um) How long did you stay up there? Well maybe I should say, when was the, when was the first time you saw other Cambodian people, and where?

P: [Unclear] it's far away. It's like probably 1985, '84, '85 when I knew that there were some more kids coming now, arriving, refugee, the orphans arriving before, even before the people. In somewhere in Amherst, around Amherst when we go and greet them, yah.

A: Amherst, Mass.? (P: Yah) Okay.

P: Greet them and [unclear] and have an idea of starting a temple.

A: Really.

P: First temple in Amherst for that.

A: And so what happened on that day when you saw other Cambodian people?

P: I was very happy. I knew that I was, I was in part helping out. I was in part, but I helped, I'm going to help a lot, because Peter encouraged me to go out and speak about my experiences and get people changed their minds, you know. In churches, churches help; writing letters through their Congressmen because of the effect that I had on them. The two started earlier, then they stopped.

A: Really? Yah.

P: Yah.

A: Now do you remember the first time you came to Lowell?

P: No, but I came to Lowell probably in, a while ago, but just, just come around to visit, come around to see other orphans. But really when I come work here it was '90, '96 already.

A: Okay.

P: I came back from Cambodia, you know, then '96. And then I met [San Khan]. And then I heard some [Sam Khun]` was a new, new, new, was a new kid on the block, also that he was from Chicago. (A: Yah) And when the Cambodian, Cambodian CMAA was in the other street, (A: Perry Street) Perry Street, and they were so quiet there. And I began to, I said, "When is the last time that a youth club, youth, youth group here." They said, you know, "Three years ago, and then there were no, nothing." And then I, I started youth right away. I started a youth group until, until, until I leave. And then nothing again happened. I feel bad about it. No, there's still, Sayong is taking charge over this, Sayong continued it. So it make me feel very happy. [Someone speaking in background: Not for the CMAA though] Not with the CMAA, see. So yah, she went someplace else, but at least there's something continued. Like I've started here the first Cambodian Summer Youth Program here, with Judge Wilson.

A: Oh really.

P: And with Eileen Donahue.

A: Okay.

P: She supported that personally. (A: Okay) So we got the first Cambodian, Cambodian Summer Youth Program, for the youth.

A: So where did you meet San Khan at?

P: At the Perry, Peter, Perry Street.

A: At Perry. You just went there to visit?

P: I went there and I said, you know, "I want to, I just came from Cambodia, any work I can do?" She said, "You know, you can start youth program."

A: Yah. Did you get paid higher than a paid person?

P: A little bit. No, no, no, no, I got paid very little. I don't care how much I get, you know. But then there was some salary. I mean some more, and I asked, you know, like this. Then after that it's '96, '97, '98, '99, the year 2000, '99, that I raise, I raised quite a lot of money for the Youth Group, and for CMAA as a whole.

A: You did. (P: Yah) How did you do that?

P: Again, my connection you know, like [unclear]. I speak. I go around speaking and we you know, I've been, I was on a newspaper quite constantly. I mean I knew that we need to reach out. Not that I knew that we need to be able to see, and you know, Cambodian community in Lowell need to reach out to the mainstream. I probably know more than a lot of people about this reach out, reaching out to the mainstream. I mean we tend to, to work in our circle, community you know, but we need our outside, their help. And I already have my connection with Amnesty International, (A: Yup) and like you know, Boston Globe wrote about me a few times, Boston Herald, and they continue to ask me to go around speaking. And I got to know, John Kerry came to you know, to CMAA.

A: Did he?

P: Yah, he came to the CMAA and had a meeting with some, with CMAA. And the first thing he said that you know, "Is Arn around?" I mean he asked for me, and people were at awe. Many people including San Khan. "How did he know you?" You know, people respect him like God here. I mean John Kerry come to CMAA, oh every Cambodian go crazy, you know. I was [unclear]. I mean I don't really, I've never met him before, but he you know, I know Mike Dukakis, Mrs. Dukakis, the whole family. And I was in Amnesty International. I, many times I spoke in front of Congressmen, you know, like Congress Hearing. So John Kerry was involved and so, with the Cambodian issue, you know, because he's, he's a veteran, a Vietnam Vet. (A: Right) So he said ah, yah, "Before I speak here, I just wanted you to know that I, keep up the good work. And you were, you were one of my, you know, like I update myself with you, whatever you do with Cambodia. So I really admire what you do." And you know he said that before his talk. So people, "Oh, yah, yah, yah. How do you know him," and all that? So that kind of, that kind of connection that I have, that I can get money sometimes without any proposal. (A: Yah.) I just say, "Please give me \$5,000, or \$10,000 for the youth." "Okay, give me two pages. What do you want it for?" "You know, I do that and for the CMAA too, you know. So the youth activity become, like I was here, yah, I make, I make something happen, a lot of things happen.

A: What got you interested in proposing a youth group to begin with?

P: Oh you know, my life, my life, I've started [unclear] the war as an International Youth Group in 1990, 1994, 1984, which bring in young people from all over the world where there's conflict from war torn countries, mostly from both sides of the conflict. (A: Okay) Like Israeli, Palestinian, South Africans, kids black and white, to come to America. And we were asked to speak at the United Nation. We toured around. We

bring about forty-five of them from different country. I co-founded the organization. So we went on Night Line. We were in, we were in CNN. We were in, in many places you know. In New York Times, I was quoted in New York Time of the day, quote of the day.

A: Wow.

P: And so, and I, I became interested in working with the gang members, you know, with trying to get kids out of the gang, (A: Okay) because of the fighting between gangs, different gangs. That's how I met, I met [Siarja], and how I started the peace, peacemaker, bringing young, bringing gang members from different groups, Latino, black, Hispanic, Chinese, Cambodian, to come together and do mediating. And while, while the [grips and the blood] are doing their owns in Los Angeles during the time, I, I know the guy who (--)

Side A ends

Side B begins.

P: We called each other. We talked. And he heard of me and he knows me. And he said, "Arn, you know, you're doing (--)" But it's not as a large scale like he did, you know. (A: Yah) Reconciling the [blood and the grip] together. But I was, I was in the dangerous mode, and I started the peacemaker. Lasted, lasted until today. It's a 2 million dollars, 2 million dollar organization right now called the Peacemaker, in Providence. Where the Police Department took the whole thing. I started with nothing, with no money. Took the whole things, now they, they buy, they buy the football equipment, where many, many hardcore gang member come to play football, because of the equipment, because of the uniform. And the police can identify them. Can encourage them not to make any trouble in the street. It was very successful in Providence. And probably now they don't even know who started the damn thing. The Police Department knows. And Sergeant Patterson now get a job just because of that. Get a job going around the country now talking about the, the model, model organization for the nation, for America, of that Peacemaker. And he said, and one time he crossed paths. I was all over the world and come back, and then they invite me to the same place as he was. He was, I was talking about Amnesty International, he was talking about the Peacemaker in Providence. He said, "I would like to credit this to Arn." I was sitting there, I said, "Sergeant!" "Oh he's here!"

A: Really, yah.

P: I said, "Arn, you know, I'm glad I mentioned your name man." I said, "I'm glad too man!" We starting this together. And so Sergeant Patterson spoke about it as a model. And he said it goes, it goes on right now, and he thanks me, and he told people the senior people. So I have, I have in a way, my name around America.

A: Yah, yah. What's his first name?

P: Who?

A: Patterson, Sergeant Patterson?

P: Sergeant, I don't know.

A: You don't remember? So what were some of the activities?

P: And also Sergeant [Munson] in Lowell, [Munson] in Lowell, and Sergeant Patterson. Jim, Tim Patterson, or something like that.

A: And so what were the activities that you did with the Youth Group here in Lowell?

P: We, I started, you know, I do believe that volunteer, volunteer work is good. Do the work like you're doing you know, like keep beautiful, you know, those kind of work, like cleaning street and cleaning the tunnel, you know, cleaning the (--) And in the way I don't like to take it literally, but it's like cleaning the street, it's like cleaning yourself, you know. Cleaning your, the bad deeds that you were doing, you know, I like to do that metaphorically. (A: Um) And I told them that, I told the kids. Let's so it together, you know. We've been doing it, and I (--) So well we started doing that in front of CMAA first, and then we go around do that in Lowell.

A: Really.

P: Cleaning up. (A: Wow) And I even, even after that I went all the ways to start it in Cambodia.

A: Okay, wow.

P: Yah, in Cambodia we work with, you know, like we started with thirty kids now and we do about 70,000 members. And they're cleaning up of the city of Phnom Penh, the whole Phnom Penh, we clean it up. We went, we went here, maybe sixty kid each time, or twenty kids each time in Cambodia. When they go out and clean up the street, it's like a thousand kids at a time, each time. And in Phnom Penh the street had not been cleaned for whatever, how long, for fifty years. They were literally with shit, and with human bones when the Khmer Rouge killed them. I, I am sure, and I love to take credit for this organization that I started that CVCD, Cambodian Volunteer for Community Development, that they clean the damn whole Phnom Penh up. Now there were two private French company that now they have trucks, and they make money out of it.

A: But before it was volunteer?

P: Oh yah. My kids cleaned the damn whole city. It's like cleaning the whole country. And I'm happy, you know, even though people sometime don't know who start this, who start that, but I know. I know, and not only me, but there are other kids who were

involved. And that's all I want. That's all, I don't need anybody else to know but I. If I know about it I'm happy about it. I'm very satisfied.

A: Yah, yah. Now who were some of the interesting kids you met working at the CMAA?

P: Apathy, there's a girl, a group, I'm upset at them now, that they are breaking up. But again, they, their name Apathy.

A: Apathy.

P: Apathy, that's a group name. There's group names. Kim, there's four other girls that come in together, you know, see me. And while they were in high school some troubles like many other girls who come to CMAA.

A: Yah. It wasn't the girls that were in the movie, was it?

P: Yes.

A: Those, those young girls?

P: Yes. (A: Okay) They were also singers. They were like [Siarja] in a way, but they, they probably in a little lower league. But Siarja was the more mature. I mean you see, you can tell, see where Siarja got into now.

A: Those, those young ladies sang at your awards ceremony in Manchester, didn't they?

P: Yes. Yes.

A: Okay, I remember them now.

P: Yes, they sang in front of the city hall too, (A: Okay) yes, for Eileen. (A: Okay) They broke up now. They were potential. But again, it's not a failure. They promised me that they will hold on to each other, and they did. [Unclear] you know, like right now they all, I'm very sure all of them are in college, and on their way going to college. So I'm fine, but I've still continued, I still want to continue my friendship with them, and I want to take them to Cambodia. They didn't know that. They should have known that, I told them, but I never gave up on things. Even though I said, maybe sooner, or later. Take us probably two years now, three years that I left CMAA, and they continue to be together, and they broke the promise first by breaking up [unclear]. But it's not a bad thing. It's just that they probably need to go to school instead. They chose in priority. But I still want them to go to Cambodia though, singing. (A: Yah) And I have to find out where they are now. But they got out. So I have to ask them where, are they still interested in going to Cambodia. Like I help Siarja to go to Cambodia.

A: Tell us about Siarja.

P: Oh they are, they are probably a national now, national. In Cambodia I brought them for the first time. They were overnight sensational. Overnight famous in Cambodia. But it doesn't take long, it doesn't take much in Cambodia. (A: Yah) One, is Cambodia and Americans. Two, they're bringing something new, hip-hop. And three, even something better. I, we commissioned them to do a song, which hip-hop song with your Cambodian traditional instruments. And we get the master in Cambodia perform with them on stage.

A: Really.

P: Yup, hip-hop in traditional instruments, traditional master on stage, and then, and on the national TV.

A: Really.

P: Yup.

A: And how did that go?

P: Oh man, everyone knows, especially street kids in Cambodia, war kids, shoe shiners, flower girls, like they would go out anywhere, they got greeted by you know, ten you know, twenty, thirty of them were on the street in Phnom Penh overnight. And the master respect them, they respect the master, and the you know, the Cambodia Master Performer Project that I've started too. I've been trying to, I asked them to give, they're not Karaoke star. (A: Right) In Cambodia now Karaoke's are taking charge, taking over Cambodia now. And, what are you doing?

A: Just taking pictures. Just keep talking.

P: And they, they, I want, I want to grab attention of young people there. We lose two or three, we lose two or three generation now in Cambodia to the hip-hop, and two the Cambodian leader continue to fight each other, bickering each other you know, and nobody paying attention, not so many people paying attention to Cambodian children, which they are our future. To educate them about you know, about life, about school, about, especially about volunteerism; about how to take care of other people, not only yourself. Respect older people. So I know that to grab the young people attention you have to use younger people. (A: Right) And nothing better Cambodian American hip-hop Siarja. And they are all of a sudden, overnight, their dream to go to Cambodia, I made it true for them, make it reality for them less than two years. And they, they thank me for it. They were testing me whether I'm real or not. And I test them whether they're real or not.

A: Yah, yah.

P: And their dream is that Arn also singing for Amnesty International, because you were involved in Amnesty, we heard about Amnesty, we would love to. And then through like

Alex's wife, Alex's wife who's in our circle of the, you know, of the Cambodian Master Performer Project, he also happened to know the recent, the recent, the current director of Amnesty International, Bill. So we set up a meeting in New York, and we got Siarja, you know, to get him hype up, to get Siarja and sing this song for Amnesty International Annual, Annual Conference this year. We said, "Arn, when are you coming back to Cambodia? I want to speak also before they perform." I said, "All right, fine." So I came here just two months ago in Pittsburgh. I dropped by Pittsburgh and I spoke, and they sang. That was their, their dream. Even that is with a double, sort of a double excitement, a double dream for them, because that, this year Amnesty International Conference, Yoko Ono give the right to them to play the "Imagine" song for the theme song for this year, [human right]. And they said, "Can Siarja sing it?" She said, "Who's Siarja?" Probably she found out. They said, "Oh, maybe a group of Cambodian young hip-hop." They said, "Okay."

A: Wow.

P: And it happens that the, I mean it's all time song right, "Imagine". (A: Sure) And also the movie "Killing Field" ends with (--)

A: With that song?

P: With "Imagine" song. It's a, sort of like (--)

A: A coincidence, huh?

P: Yah. And so, and they, and Siarja took them some time to remix it. They're doing it hip-hop, hip-hop kind, and there's rap, in the middle of the "Imagine" song now. They are, they are secretly now in their way now to make a song, to make a CD, their first CD with our Commission song, CMPP song, Commission song and their John Lennon all time songs, and probably five or six other songs that they went to Cambodia a second time to record.

A: Including the one with the master musicians?

P: Instruments, yes. With many, with many now, with many different instruments now.

A: Wow.

P: Yup. So they're going to come out, they're going to come out in a few months.

A: That's big!

P: Yup.

A: How did you meet those guys?

P: Who?

A: Tony and the rest of those guys.

P: Yah, through CMAA. It was coincidence that I, I spoke about the youth (:A: Yah) at the Lowell, Lowell Community, UMass, Lowell UMass. UMass Lowell.

A: UMass Lowell. Center for Work Family Community.

P: No. University, what's that downtown?

A: Middlesex?

P: Middlesex.

A: You went to speak there?

P: Yah. And then um (--)

A: What did you speak there for, who?

P: For, I don't know, for the, I don't know.

?: At the National Park, International Day.

P: Probably that, yes.

A: International Day?

?: Yah, Middlesex Community College. Yah, I remember.

P: [Unclear] helped me to go and speak there for, and then I played the flute. (A: Okay) And then, and then Tony, a cool dude, cool guy, head top guy, I went to the bathroom and pee, and he come and pee near me. And he said, "Arn you know, I really like you flute so much man. Really kids like your flute a lot. And you know, I'm Tony. I'm you know, I have my band sort of. I'm the leader of the band called Siarja. And really I, I want to do some CD man. Can you help me out?"

A: Which flute was he talking about, this one, or the one you play?

P: The one I play.

A: Okay.

P: And I say, "What kind of song are you doing?" Okay, hip-hop and something. I say, "Okay. I'm planning to do my first CD too. Would you, would you let me hear your

song, a song or something?" And he let me hear. I liked it. And I put in his song and the [unclear] and for my first CD, his saw what was on the first, of my first CD. (A: Okay) And I sing with the, you know, the most popular Karaoke singers in Cambodia. (A: Right) So they, they were, they were with me since. They, they (--) I, I began where I was invited to speak about the youth. I remember when I took them to Wheaton College. They said, "Arn, how do they know you?" Wheaton College, [Unclear], Columbia University, everywhere. I said, "I have my name around man." They said, "Can we go with you?" I said, "Sure." So they get some money, start making some money. I split with them now. I usually write, like not much money. I ask you know, two hundred dollars, something. (A: Right) You know, some of their, like scholar speaker, they get thousands of dollars to speak in the school man. I don't ask them. They don't give me what I don't ask. (A: Right) And when after I spoke, Siarja sang. So we split, you know, a hundred each. They're three guys. I'm going to (--) And they begin to get to know Siarja, and they liked it. A lot of schools like it. I took them to Maine. I took them to Vermont. (A: Really) Now they, they continue to be proven that they're good. They write, now they write songs about trash land kids. They go to see the trash land in Cambodia. They talk about aids. They talk about landmines. They sing about you know, universal love of course. (A: Yah) You know with some message of peace. And then they're good at it. And I said, "That's what I want man. That's what I want, and I want to promote that." And that's my life. If you promote violence and killing, I'm not in your league man. I'm sorry. They said, "Oh, oh, okay, good. I'm in your league too. I want to be, that you would promote us a lot." So that's how it goes.

A: Yah. What? Where did you live when you moved to Lowell? Where was the first place you lived?

P: Near the Smith House.

A: What Smith House?

P: I rent the Smith?

A: The Smith Baker Center?

P: Yah.

A: Downtown near city hall and the library?

P: No. (A: No?) They call it Smith.

?: It's on the, after, across the bridge, that little bridge down there?

P: I rent the house. I rent. I rent an apartment.

A: Where? Where is it though? Centralville?

?: Yah, you know where that hill, yah?

A: Christian Hill?

?: Yah, it's that hill right here.

A: What street?

?: Smith Street.

A: Smith Street?

?: Yah.

P: Yah, what they call Drum Hill.

A: Drum Hill, that's in (--)

?: No. It's Christian Hill.

P: Oh, no, no, no, I made a mistake. Yah.

?: It's Christian Hill.

A: Christian Hill. There's no Smith Street over there. Smith Street is right here in the Highlands.

?: I know, that's what [unclear]. Avenue maybe, I don't know.

P: That's Smith Street in the Highlands.

A: That's where you moved to first?

P: Yah. I had an apartment there.

A: And how did you find that apartment?

?: You do it the first time right? Remember? When you left, as soon as you got out that apartment down there, [unclear] and you lived together.

P: Yah, very briefly, and then I went with Sayong, performed the two years. Word of mouth

A: Yah, who was the first guy you lived with?

P: You know the film? (A: Yah) The film that I was trying to park the car? That's Smith Street.

A: Oh okay. Oh Nesmith Street!

P: Oh Nesmith, not Smith Street.

A: Yah, Nesmith Street.

P: Yah, yah, yah, yah.

A: Yah, Sayong lived over there, right?

P: Yah, that was Nesmith Street, that's on the film.

A: Yah, okay. I saw that. I recognized it. I knew that right away.

?: He's a Park Ranger. He knew every corner.

A: I used to deliver mail there. So I knew where you were as soon as (--) My favorite part of the movie was opening up and there's Jackson Street. That's great! [Laughs]

P: Yes, there's Jackson Street. That's right. That's right. That's right.

A: So when you first moved to Lowell you lived on Nesmith Street?

P: And Jackson Street will be, will be on big screen in Broadway in New York, [Lincoln Center].

A: They going to show that?

P: Sure. 18.

A: They're going to show the flute player?

P: 18, 19, 20 of June.

A: Of June.

P: In conjunction, in conjunction with [Human Right Watch, May].

A: Wow, tremendous.

P: Yup. So Jackson Street will be in Broadway.

A: When can, when can I buy a copy of the movie?

P: I don't know man. You'll have to ask Jocelyn.

A: Yah, well she's going to call me next week, because we're going to try and do a showing in here in Lowell next month.

P: Please help to organize that, man. [Unclear], man.

A: Yah, anything for you. Anything for you.

P: No, I appreciate. For you and I, we have not really get to know each other very much. I mean we, we came to the sort of conference together, remember, at your place?

A: Where?

P: Conference about the art!

A: Oh yah, right.

P: Come on man.

A: Yah, I remember.

P: And we just saw (--) We just, (--) We, we (--) I went to your office. I sat at your office chair. You told me. Um, but I don't get (--)

A: You used my phone or something?

P: Yah. I don't get to know you very well, but I heard you, you know, married a Cambodian girl from Cambodia. And you're a big fan of Cambodia. I appreciate that. Have you been in Cambodia?

A: Yah, twice.

P: Oh yah! Thinking in the future sometime again soon?

A: Yah, maybe I go with you guys. I told Allen I wanted to go with you guys.

?: Yah, you should go.

P: You know what, I, damn, I tried to get Bun Rith, or trying to get Cambodian American Institute in Cambodia too, man. It's all mainland ship. There's all big ship there. And we are being invaded culturally, economically by Chinese, or Vietnamese, and the Thai. I'm not, I'm a peacemaker okay. Don't get me wrong. I don't, I don't, I don't promote killing anymore, and I'm just saying that the Cambodian are being swallowed by the Chinese, the Thai business people, and they need to be nice to the

Cambodians. They need to be thinking of Cambodian. I want to teach them too, saying, "If you come to someone else's country, you make money out of them, sucking their blood, please be nice to them. Please respect them." Sometimes they, they don't. Right now they only, everything is great about Chinese. Everything is great about Thai, or Vietnamese, because of the movie. They don't have any, all the movie. We would like to make all the movie. That's my job. I'm going to make the difference there. And if you want to help out, please help out on this. Art, culture, that's what make us proud of ourselves. That's what they don't want, to have us be proud of ourself. If that, they can take over that, they can take over. That's bad. I don't want to have them to do that. What happen if we want to you know, invade your country too man. No, be nice to each other now. We have only a little land now. Let the Cambodian live man. So I asked them, if you make them, you know, be nice to it economically. And there's no charity in Cambodia whatsoever, you know. My politician or my country too, they need to encourage other young, other people who has power, which is money, money and economics. They work hard the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Thai. Yes, they work hard and they have their, they have their resources. After the killing field the Cambodian have nothing. And we need some help. We need (--) You make money out of us. We need to, for you to give us some money that you make money out of, to promote, promote doing movies, promote our culture please, you know, and not your culture.

A: Yah.

P: What happen if you want, we want them, the Chinese or Cambodian to be Cambodians, what happen? You're going to get angry, right, because you don't want people to change you. But we don't want you to change us also. We can live in peace with each other, helping each other. We are not selfish to get you, to help you to make a livelihood for yourself, and for your own race in Cambodia, but be nice, because that's what, how Pol Pot started.

A: Right.

P: And they're still around. I don't want to say anything. They're still around. The people are being oppressed by other people. And naturally where there is oppression there will be naturally occur of rebellions. (A: Right) And I do believe that. If they don't rebel they're going to die anyway. So they will rebel. They will up-rise. (A: Right) That's a law, maybe natural law. I don't know. I can't control over that. When being, people being oppressed, a group of people, a group of race, or group of nation being oppressed, they will up-rise until they (--) If they don't up-rise, they're going to die anyway. So they up-rise. Whether they up-rising, they might have a chance to live. (A: Right) So that's what I'm just trying to be, a message from me, for the Chinese, for the Vietnamese, for the Thai.

A: Yah, well as that's going on here, I see in Lowell that the Khmer kids are being invaded by the American culture. And part of our goal at the Mogan Center is to help people preserve their traditions.

P: Fine, but also you live in America. Also, yes, America is a melting pot. We need to preserve each other's culture thanks to you, thanks to people who, who really understand this aspect. In Cambodia it's a little different.

A: There's nobody doing that [unclear].

P: Someone else coming to live in Cambodia, they should be respecting Cambodian culture, they should be respecting the Cambodian who they make money out of. (A: Yah) I want you to make this clear in your article for the sakes of human beings.

A: Yah.

P: Not, not, I'm not, but particularly, particularly it happened that the Chinese, and Thai, and Vietnamese happened to make a really nice livelihood, and take advantage of Cambodia after this war, after the war, so many generations. And political figures, political leaders using it as

Political. I'm not. I'm just saying as neutral human beings, that the politician plan, whether the Vietnamese probably takes politician, or Chinese politician, or Thai politician, or the Cambodian politician, planned to have more Vietnamese, or more Thai, more Chinese people, you know, Chinese business people to come to Cambodia to make a lot of money out of Cambodia so there can be pride, and giving money. We need more money into the Cambodian's hand, into the Cambodian locals, because they are still starving in their own country after these years war and ended up in the killing field. We need the rich and the powerful in Phnom Penh, the Thai, the Chinese, the Vietnamese, we need them help. We need their help. We need them to get involved in giving some money to, to the poor. Now the poor Cambodian people coming to back in Phnom Penh from the countryside, and being laughed at, being stepped on, no place to sleep in the city, by, stepped on by the other people, you know, other people except Cambodians. That will, will again, naturally people will up-rise. This time might not be Pol Pot. This time might not be Khmer Rouge that, it will be something. It will be different form, but they need to understand this is a human thing. It's not political. That if you make a lot of money, and make good life of yourselves in Cambodia, you need to know that yes, the Cambodia will be angry at you if you don't help them, of course. So please, please, please, we need help. We need your help to help. And we will do it together hopefully. And I hope, I hope that the, when I go back in the future when all projects you know, expand a little bit, that we will go to you, to the Chinese businessman in Cambodia, to the Vietnamese business man in Cambodia, to the Thai businessman. This is the heart of the problems. This is the heart of it. We need to address it. I'm not addressing. This is my first time talking to you now, or talking to anybody about this issue. (A: Really?) I'm telling, yah, this is first time. And please understand me. I'm not anybody political, political parties. I'm talking, I appealing to you as Cambodian orphans, as a Cambodians, you know, as a Cambodian, you know, ordinary person, that these things naturally will occur, and for you, good for your race too; the Cambodian, or the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Thai, good for your own race too. To learn how to give back to someone, or to Cambodia that you make money out of, and there will be ways that I will engage you guys to get money back to the Cambodian through their art, through the

culture, through singing, not the bearer of the guns. I'm not talking about how to make war. I'm not talking about how to kill the Vietnamese, the Chinese, or the Vietnamese. No, I'm not interested in that, because we all are human beings. But you're coming to Cambodia, we will be many space, many place for us to donate money to help the Cambodians to have the Cambodian feel proud of themselves, and they would thank you. We would thank some Vietnamese. We would thank the Chinese. We would thank the Thai for helping us you know, to alleviate with our government, Cambodian government to alleviate poverty and hunger, and starvation and disease, aids, landmines, in Cambodia. Oh man, Phnom Penh, the Chinese and Laos, and the Chinese and Vietnamese and the Thai in Phnom Penh, they can help so much with the government. They can help not only Cambodian Americans, or Cambodian French, or Cambodian [unclear], go back to help, but they are tremendous resources in Phnom Penh with this rich foreigners, you know, ownerships of tremendous monies, money that they build, they build, they build like you know, grandeur of restaurants, of night life, clubs. You go, you go, and if I'm wrong, if a restaurant, a nightclub, most of them, and are very beautiful fancy, fancy hotels and are owned by foreigner.

A: Really?

P: You go. They might speak, they might speak Cambodians, but they only take two years to learn Cambodian. I give them three years to learn Cambodian, how to speak Cambodian, and they might say, "I'm Cambodian." But why? Okay, if they are Cambodian, listen. Okay. You have the Cambodian citizenship. This is the heart of the problem I'll tell you for Cambodia, big issue. If necessary now they're becoming Cambodians now. Okay, they came 1979 the Vietnamese. Probably a million Vietnamese live in Cambodia now.

A: Really?

P: Yup. And they got citizenship, more than, probably more than a million. If they got citizenship, they're very different, admit it. Very different from Cambodians, (A: Right) of course.

A: Right.

P: Character is different. Their looks are different. I mean the Chinese and the Vietnamese are quite similar, but again they have their friend. If you, if you say, "Oh you look all the same man!" They're going to get very angry man, right? Like the Korean and the Japanese, if you say to them, "You look the same," they're going to get very angry. They say, "We are not the same." (A: Right) Now I'm not saying to the Chinese, or the Thai, or the Chinese and the Vietnamese are the same either, they're not. And I don't want, I don't wish that the foreigner come to Cambodia and say, "Oh, you all look the same. We can't tell if you are Chinese, Vietnamese, or Cambodians, please, we are different. And the Vietnamese and the Chinese are different, yes. And we would like you know, to have (--) They practice their religion, they practice their culture. Now they have more money. They reinforce that their culture into Cambodia. But again, because

of their money, of their power, I would like (--) Why, and they claim that they are Cambodians, which they probably technically is, are, that why are the Cambodian Culture, the Cambodian Arts are being not, being, are not supported. Karaoke, that's all we have. Orchestra without music, right. Music without orchestra, or whatever it is, very shallow. Why are still the Cambodians, the Cambodians treasure, Cambodian legend like this old women are living on the street, starving? She is of national treasure of my country. She is like identity of my country, of my race. (A: Yah) Why this old man, the best flute player in Cambodia, living in the sewerage, drunk? Why my culture, culture is identity of my people, why they're not being promoted? Why they are not being helped? (A: Yah) That's just, I'm asking, because we are not being promoted because how many, so many, how many Chinese, how many Vietnamese, how many Thais in the capitol of my country?

A: Pushing their own culture forward.

P: Sure. And I don't want to blame them, because right. If they are most powerful, and my government need to help out on this, that why, why, they of course they promote their culture. And again they say, I'm Cambodians. I'm confused here. Right? But all we have is Karaoke. And we are not again, see you promoting you know, the Chinese, or the Vietnamese, or the Thai, because it's yours. It's your identity. You can respect that.

A: Umhm. Umhm.

P: But this is in Cambodia, and I ask you to help, to help (A: Right) not to step on us, making money on us, sucking money, sucking money and sucking our blood, sucking at us, and saying (--) The Cambodian are nothing. The Cambodian are so stupid. The Cambodian are so dumb. Please don't do that, you know? Please be nice helping each other. This is a really good topic for us to discuss. This is, I'm saying this for you man. And I couldn't believe I say this without anger. Without an anger toward the Chinese, the Thai, the Vietnamese. I said to them again, I could be in danger saying all of this, you know what, in Phnom Penh, because I'm (--)

A: You could be in danger?

P: Yah, sure. But, but I'm appealing as a human being. I'm appealing as orphans, and I say there's tremendous power. I see this, I see my government, a very big powerhouse to help this, and they've been doing this and trying hard, okay, please hear me. They're trying hard. I'm not blaming. (A: Umhm) They are tremendous that help to save my culture and my, my culture and my, my, my character, Cambodian character is very different from any character people in the world. We're not better than anyone else, but we are different. I'd like to preserve that. Beautiful character, Khmer character. You have a Cambodian wife. Beautiful character, Khmer character. They're very nice. They're soft. They are graceful. They are peacemaker. I'd like to preserve that. And our culture is our identity. Identity. You didn't know that. I'd like to, I'd like to really encourage people to help me to preserve that. And the other powerhouse is Cambodian abroad, like myself. Cambodian American, Cambodian Australian, Cambodian French,

Cambodian, no would go back and have this. If the Cambodian, in Cambodia is much stable enough, which is now sort of yes. For twenty years now it's a matter of time than anywhere else, than any other time, to go back and help. And I try very hard to convince many young people from America, Cambodian American, Cambodians, we're doing very well right now. We are about to have you on team, and I'm so happy, because Lowell is a second life. This Cambodian population, we look to be connected to Cambodia somehow to our main mother ship. And they need help so much in the mother ship over there. And not lastly, but the big powerhouse is there in Phnom Penh. I have not really talked about that. I have not really approached that in artistic term, and in human term, to go around Phnom Penh. To talk to the Vietnamese, the Thai, and Chinese, that has money, tons of money, tons of money! That probably they don't put it in Cambodia, in the Cambodian bank because they don't trust it. They put it in probably Chinese bank, Vietnam bank, and so money out of Cambodia. This is the heart of the situation of the poverty of Cambodia. And while our government also, and while our own people keep borrowing the bank from [ADB], from Asian, Asian bank and make our old, make our many generation, our children to pay back in the next ten years, to be slave again. But if we don't address this powerhouse, that what I mention, powerhouse, which is we need the Chinese, their help. The Chinese are tired of Vietnamese powerhouse in Cambodia to have a charity kind of something, to help alleviate the poor, to help saving my culture. We just keep not being truthful to the problem, to the real problem, to the root cause. Why suffer? Why the Cambodian all of a sudden kill the Thai? Why Cambodian all of a sudden kill the Chinese? Why the Cambodian all of a sudden kill the Vietnamese? They are the killer. They are, they are (--) Why, why, you know, we thought they are Buddhists, we thought they are really a peacemaker. Why? Tell me, prove to me, why? Because they are killer! And again, pause for a moment, and say, "Why did they have such thing?" I did tell you early, we have to address the root cause. The root cause is the economic fairness. (A: Yup) The root cause is the respect of each other. Not to come to someone else's country and say, "You like, you know, we treat you like a dog." For example, for example, I'm glad I talk to you about this. (A: Yah) For example, there are hundreds of thousands, probably millions of the Khmer soldier who fought for many, many years for their nation. (A: Right) That blown off, that their leg blown out. It was on New York Time just yesterday. It breaks my heart, because I was one of the child soldier. I was trapped into this war, and I was damn lucky not to get blown off. (A: Yah) It's 90% chance that I wouldn't, that I would step on that mine. I didn't. I was so damn lucky. There's hundreds of thousands, probably millions of Cambodians who, who got their arms blown off. It's a big case in Cambodia now, that the government try very hard again. I don't want to have any trouble with the government, but the government, the king and everyone, every parties are trying hard to help out on this issue, but the powerhouse is with this foreigner that hold the power in Phnom Penh. Where so many, it doesn't only affect the soldier that got nothing now. They are a patriotic Cambodians. They are now, currently they are beggars, worse than a dog, in the street of Phnom Penh. How can you see a society treating, treating, treating people that fights. It's like a Vietnam Vet coming back to America, coming back to America, right, it hurts them. (A: Yah) And these are the people who are making trouble. It's not only them not making trouble, but the anger. These I see, the soldier, the former soldier that, that fighting for their lives, for their country now, being bad tracking themselves begging on the street,

you know, and not, most of the time they're not being noticed of. So ashamed, right. And it's not only affect only him alone. His wife, his children, and those are the future of Cambodia, their children. So you, that's the root cause of it if you want to know. And I hope you have all of this man, because I like to pursue, I like to pursue this man, I like to pursue this, because this is good. Cambodia is just a small country that we, it's an experiment for us. The cycle of hatred, the cycle of, the cycle of anger, the cycle of killing, this is what I'm just talking about. (A: Yah) They might say, "Arn, what are you talking about? I'm not responsible for the people who, I'm not responsible for the people who are blown up by landmines." Yes, we are all responsible, we all, including myself. Including myself responsible for this, including Americans responsible for this. Including everyone has to be responsible for this. (A: Yah) Right? Including the Chinese, the Thai, the Vietnamese who comes now making money out these people. The world has come to Cambodia to help Cambodia with 2 billion dollars, to help Cambodia in the name of Cambodians. In the name of these handicapped. In the name of these poor. Don't forget that. You make money out of that 2 billion dollars. Please, please help. And we will go to you not with guns. We will go to you with my two hands. This is Cambodian culture. They're so, they're blaming themselves now because they are poor. They're blaming themselves now because they're starving to death. They're blaming themselves now because of the killing field. They're blaming themselves now because they run through minefields. The Cambodian are blaming themselves for this. That's not fair to them, please, for the victims who blame themselves. That's the worst thing the world do that for them! These three, or four powerhouse responsible for that, including me, coming to live in America for myself. Make a new life for myself. So I'm going back, going there. I'm going to ask people, I will ask everybody in my government, peaceful, peaceful, with my government, with my ten fingers, with my hands put up to my head. And with all, with the soldiers, with all of you, with all of you business people, we'll go. Please help us to alleviate the poverty in my culture. That's, that's the only cause of that. And I, I like to, you know, this is a big deal man. This could save my people's life, and I'm planning to do a lot. Please, please keep (--)

A: Well we're going to transcribe this soon. We'll get you a copy so you can read it, and reread it.

P: Because why I want this, because I don't talk about it. This is the first time for me, and it's really, because of my peace work in the world, the more I talk the more I grow from my talk and my moment, my moment. And I probably will forget about this. As soon as I stop talking to you I will forget about it. But then I would like to learn from what I say now.

A: Yes.

P: And then I will pursue that in Cambodia. I will, I will use that as a gateway, as my driving force when I (--)

A: Good.

P: You know? So I will, I will (--)

A: Well we'll help you to get this and then formulate it, and then you can carry it forward.

P: With group of us, all together. Not Arn Chorn's gain. Not Arn Chorn's. Not, no, it's too tiring. I want to work with you. I want to work with Siarja. I was to work with Bun Rith. I want to work with the people, millions of people there. It's fun. It's fun when we come together and help each other out with the little money we have, with the little thing we (--) It's called caring (A: Yah) about each other. Not using each other, not abusing each other. It's fun. I want to tell them it's fun. Then we will, we will not have uprising. We will not have people hating each other. (A: Right) It's, it's a really commonsense. (A: It is) It's a really commonsense, please. And I see this is Cambodia, really the cycle of hatred. And they blame only on the victims! They blame on the victims! That's why he, that's why he's poor. That's why he stepped on landmine, field, land field, because they so hated. They hate. (A: Yah) They hate, and because they're so vicious, they're so dangerous. These are some people who's rich, or some people who ride Mercedes talking. And the Cambodian people keep blaming on themselves, really. Oh they ride Mercedes. Oh they have a lot of money, they must be God. They must be doing something right in their past life. They must (--) No, it's wrong! You know why a lot of some of them get this money, I'm getting to deep and deeper now, why? You know, money is, there's no legitimate business in Cambodia. I'm sorry to say this. We need a legitimate, legitimate business in Cambodia. Legitimate business, which means morality, moral business, you know. And so people, we want to aid a society that people care about each other, sharing money, sharing wealth so everyone will live, will live their own dreams, not my dreams, right? Not my dreams, but everyone live everyone else's dream, which is to have just, just some good water to drink, school for the children, and that's all they ask. They don't ask so much. They don't ask for Mercedes. They don't ask for those things.

A: Okay.

P: We should stop now.

A: All right.

P: We should stop now.

A: Okay.

P: All the [mikes split ends]. I talk out of [mikes spit ends.] I do too, that's why I know this.

?: Okay, let me ask you a question, since you know how to talk so much?

Tape I ends.

Tape II, side A begins

Female voice: Name one flower that everyone has.

P: Inside of their heart?

Female voice: It doesn't matter. Everyone has, I don't care outside, inside, whatever.

P: You know him? You know?

Female voice: I think I met him, yes. Okay, come on Arn, give me the answer fast.

P: [Unclear].

Female voice: Okay, what kind of flower does everyone have?

P: I don't like, I don't like how you say, (--)

Female voice: No, this is reality. It's not bad word, no nothing.

P: No no, I know that. I don't like to be put on the spot.

Female voice: I gave you a clue already. I said, since you talk too much, I said since you talk too much you should know that. What do you use to talk?

P: No, this doesn't do with my [unclear].

Female voice: No, I say, I mean don't think too, too deep, okay. This is shallow. You can answer it too.

P: Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

A: I don't know. You're stumping me.

P: Yah.

Female voice: Okay, what kind of flower does everyone have? I only thought it's one right, and then we just found one, another one, two of them. Okay, let me give you one. One of them is tulips, we all have two lips. So the name of the flower is tulips. Okay, and the other one, [Unclear] just found one. It's Iris. Iris, flower is Iris. And then okay, what kind of tree does everyone have? You have to know that because it's your favorite. You wrote poetry a lot about that. Palm Tree. This is a palm. See, we're getting smarter, right?

P: [Unclear]

A: Okay. Okay, any final thoughts? What do you think of the community in Lowell today?

Female voice: Sucks. I'm just kidding.

A: Sex!

Female voice: No, I said, "Sucks."

A: Oh, just sucks!

Female voice: No, I'm just kidding. I'm just joking.

P: I do believe, I like to go around sometime. I didn't, sometimes I don't, I don't you know, answer directory. You know, sometime I go around which is good, because there's no wrong or right, there's no black and white, you know, I like to stay in the middle, because I can be wrong one day. Like I'm a human being just like everyone else. And I think, I really, everyone tried the best they can you know, here, to help each other out. I do believe that. Human, human are good if they want to. And I have one person who cares about someone else, and sits in front of me, like you. So I do believe there's many out there. There are many out there. I do want to believe that. And I want to be one of the, one of the group, one of the members of the group. And I feel very good. I feel very happy, you know, coming back to Lowell. And I saw this caring you know, reaching out. Otherwise you wouldn't be here to meet him now.

A: That's right.

P: Everyone tries in their homes, and there are good in their heart. I know that, and keep it that way. That's my end to the notes. And keep up the good work. And there's a lot of things happening, a lot of good things happening here in Lowell, and with my kids, with the problems. There will be times when, there will be times when we get sick of the violence, we get sick of the hate, we get sick of too much violence on TV, or whatever we see. Each of us will, will find someway to make peace, each individual of us. And I see that. I see now. I see. I see. And we will make decision on this. And children see us doing that, they will do too. And I really like the progress here. And like tonight you know, I come back to my own town. I mean I got you know, so warm feeling, you know warm, warm greeting. And you know, Museum of Fine Art last night. And I come here. [Unclear] took me to his house, feeding me and you know. And then I sleep, even though the couch is small, but I feel, I told [unclear], I said, "It's not the couch [unclear]." He was so practically embarrassed about me coming here. I said, [unclear], I sleep on couches everywhere. And I mean in Pol Pot I sleep on the ground man. And for you, small, but you know, I'm happy there. Small couch, but I'm happy because you have a big heart in your family, and warm there. I just need a warm place, practically a warm place. I got it here. So I really appreciate everyone here in you know, in Lowell. That, that going out an extra mile to care for other people, you know, for other race, for other community, for other culture. That has been half of my life I'm trying to promote, you

know, and try to forget half of other life that I experienced, the violence and the hate in my country. And it's not so good feeling. But now you know, the peace and the caring about other people, really, I really chose that, I want to choose them, you know, in my life until I die. You know it's a good feeling helping other people care about the people. So we can be (--)

A: Okay Arn, thanks very much.

P: Eat, let's eat first man, before you go.

A: Okay.

End of Interview